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Postman may soon become fond memory of bygone era

By Franklynn Peterson
and Judi K-Turkel

It doesn't take a genius to figure out that the Postal Service has trouble delivering mail in fine weather, never mind rain, sleet, or dark of night. The USPS's attempts to computerize have been farces at best, and at worst expensive tragedies.

While computerizing its Madison, Wis., depot, the USPS tossed out 25 sacks of our own new mail along with its old equipment. And after shelling out millions of dollars in ads for its E-Com electronic mail delivery, it discovered that it couldn't guarantee any faster delivery than pony-expressed first-class mail. Now it's trying to drop E-Com, which bombed when customers discovered the same thing.

But thousands of businesses large and small are already using computers to beat the USPS's pokey delivery

and high prices, and thousands more are exploring the alternatives. And every month a new company crops up to service computer owners who want faster mail at lower cost than using couriers.

One of the first alternatives was direct computer-to-computer hookup over phone wires. Trouble was, computers at both ends had to be ready and willing at the same time. The idea of electronic mailboxes came about just to solve that problem. By using a third computer as an electronic mailbox, computer one can deposit its message in the 'box' at its own convenience. Computer two can phone the mailbox whenever it wants to pick up

its messages. That's all there is to 'E-Mail' in its simplest form.

Western Union is the largest provider of what we call public computerized mailboxes. Its two services, Telex and EasyLink, reach over 200,000 users in the US and nearly two million internationally. Unlike most other services, it provides a directory of subscribers so you can find out if your letter's intended recipient can be reached via WU.

Here's one example of how public computerized mailboxes can be used: With our word processing program, we drafted a computerized message to WU users asking how well they liked WU's mailbox system. Then,

with our telecommunications program, we dialed WU, told its computer the ID numbers of 20 of their subscribers, and transmitted the text of the message we wanted sent to them. It took under five minutes and cost a grand total of \$1.19 to reach all 20.

Most of the online data bases (computerized public-access reference libraries) provide public mailbox services. The Source and CompuServe are the biggest, and both assess membership fees, but their additional charges for E-Mail use are very modest. Most of their mailbox users are computer hobbyists and very small businesses.

In addition to the above-mentioned public computerized mailboxes, there are providers of private boxes to which only qualified users can get access. Among the largest is ITT's Dialcom, which now services 80,000 mailboxes internationally. Most clients use

Dialcom's computers and software to run their in-company E-Mail facilities. Westinghouse, for example, has 6,000 boxes for its employees. Chuck Carroll, Westinghouse's VP of International Public Relations, calls it 'a slick way to send a note to a guy in Sydney and get his answer the next morning.'

The Platt Music Corporation of Chicago rents an electronic mailbox for its sales reps at KeyFax Videotex, in which it posts updates on prices and supplies for rapidly changing merchandise. And many computer-owning professionals create their own small mailbox systems. For example, Dr. Daniel Savage of Washington, DC, set up a bulletin board (as these mailboxes are called when they're open to public access) so his fellow cardiologists can swap memos as they hurry amongst clinical rounds, research labs, and lectures.

What if you want to use your computer to send mail to companies whose computers you can't reach? For that, WU and its arch-rival MCI Mail offer computers that receive your electronic letters and spew them onto paper via highspeed laser printers in their office nearest to your recipient. MCI's mail goes into orange envelopes, WU's into blue, but both get sent to post offices for hoped-for next-day delivery. For a hefty premium, they substitute a faster and more reliable courier service for Postal Service mail.

As with everything else in computers, E-Mail use requires plenty of compromises. MCI is aggressive, well-organized, and charges only \$18 a year membership fee, but reaches few computers, so for the most part you pay near-courier rates. Western Union reaches the quarter-million computers listed in its directory, but it has a \$25 a month minimum billing, it took us three months and two threats to get the directory, and then hours to learn the unique codes for each of 10 different types of E-Mail. Dialcom and its competitors have too steep a minimum for small businesses and are too small for most inter-business E-Mail.

Keep your fingers crossed. An international commission was recently appointed to help standardize this maze of Postal Service beaters. Still, even with its problems, for many of us E-Mail is far better than slow mail. **THE BUSINESS COMPUTER(tm)** answers questions and sends a check list of available back issues. Send stamped self-addressed envelope: P.O. Box 55028, Madison, Wis., 53705. You can read back issues on NewsNet's on-line data base: for details, 800-345-1301. (c) 1985 The Business Computer.

The Business Computer™

Quotas on Japanese auto imports cost Americans \$5 billion in 1984

By Charles Stein
Boston Globe

Americans last year gave \$2.1 billion to the United Way, a large, well-known charity. By one estimate, Americans donated much more — roughly \$5 billion — to a charity they have never heard of and which does not even have a name. Call it the Automobile Relief Fund, for lack of anything better.

The \$5 billion is Robert Crandall's best guess of what consumers paid in 1984 in higher car prices because of quotas restricting the importation of Japanese cars. Crandall, who is with the Brookings Institute, thinks that by limiting the supply of cars, the quotas added \$1,000 to the price of the average Japanese car and \$400 to the price of the average American car.

The money made 1984 a very good year for auto dealers, auto workers and auto manufacturers in Detroit and Japan, the recipients of consumers' unintentional generosity.

At the United States' request, the Japanese agreed to what were termed "voluntary export restraints" in 1981. The idea was simple: The Japanese would hold back the number of cars they shipped to

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Sector Research in Cambridge. Caught unprepared by the demand for small cars and squeezed by a tightening economy, U.S. carmakers lost more than \$5 billion in 1981-82. The industry needed a chance to adjust to a new environment, and the quotas helped give them that chance.

Detroit has used the time well. It has sharply cut its costs, negotiated a reasonable pact with the United Auto Workers and introduced more automation to its factories. The improving economy and the resurgence of interest in large cars, with their larger profits, have helped as well. Sales of Lincolns are up 49 percent in the last year, according to Ford; sales of Escorts are up just 4 percent.

Despite the progress and profits, expected to top \$10 billion for last year, Detroit is still vulnerable to the challenge from the Japanese. A 1984 book by researchers at Massachusetts Institute of Technology put the Japanese cost advantage at \$1,500 per car.

In a totally free market that advantage to sell 2.4 million cars a year, John Hammond of Data Resources, Inc., in Framingham, Mass. The quotas limit sales to 1.8 million. In two or three years, he says, the market has just completed a major shift. In a free market, the Japanese could produce 2.4 million cars a year, a market share of 15 percent.

Numbers like that make U.S. carmakers nervous. The UAW would like to see the quotas extended indefinitely with a ceiling

David Cole, a car specialist at the University of Michigan, was in Japan in November, and he found his hosts especially sensitive to the trade issue. The Japanese ran a trade surplus of \$34 billion with the United States last year, and cars represented a sizable piece of the total.

"As strategic planners, the Japanese are hard to beat," said Cole. "They don't want to do anything to jeopardize their market here for the next 50 years." Cole thinks that even if the quotas are not formally extended, "The Japanese will not ship cars here by the boatload."

Japan's big automakers, Toyota, Nissan and Honda, have prospered in the quota era. They have shipped expensive cars to the United States that are virtually guaranteed to sell. While they might like to see the ceiling raised a bit — 2.1 million is a number that is heard frequently — they would have no trouble living with an extension of the quotas.

Med-tech miracle can profit investors

By Brendan Boyd

Almost 1 million Americans die each year from heart disease. Of these, 80,000 are prime candidates for an artificial heart. The recent heroics at the Humana Heart Institute have focused attention on the therapeutic benefits of artificial heart technology. San Francisco's Medical Technology Stock Letter in a recent issue informed investors how they might profit from the latest med-tech miracle.

The first thing to remember, notes MTSL, is that the artificial heart market is in a very early stage, with potential profits at least five years away. So it's likely to be beset by periods of both investor overenthu-



Investor's Notebook

siasm and disenchantment. "The time to buy these stocks is when they're not being talked about and the stocks are down." In other words, not now.

Utah postmasters urged to battle proposed bills

14 June 1985
PROVO — Postmasters from throughout the state were told Thursday to put intense heat on Congress to vote against proposed changes in the private express statutes.

Thomas P. Costin Jr., president of the National Association of Postmasters of the United States, told Utah postmasters in the chapter's 48th annual convention in the Provo Excelsior Hotel that they need to voice their concerns to Utah's congressional delegation.

"I'm scared that something is going to happen to this postal service," Costin said. "The heat put on members of Congress must be intense, because they're the ones who will make the difference."

Costin said he is especially concerned about three bills that have been introduced into the House of Representatives that would repeal the private express statutes.

Private express statutes give the postal service sole authority to handle first-class mail. Postmasters claim that such a repeal would cause chaos in the mail delivery system and would encourage profit skimming of private companies at the expense of rural areas.

Costin cited examples of attempts to do away with some of the rural post offices and changes in the retirement benefit program as indications that the postal service is in trouble.

"Anybody who looks at the record that has been building up, if they're not scared, then they don't belong to the same postal service I do," he said.

Postmasters elect

24 June 1985
PROVO — Kelly Korth, Honeyville, Box Elder County, was elected president of the Utah Association of Postmasters at its recent convention.

Doris Rarick, Wellington, Carbon County, was elected vice president, and Walter Borla, Helper, was chosen editor. Ellen B. Clark, Newcastle, Iron County, will serve the second year of her two-year term as secretary.

The following district directors were chosen: Ralph Chertkow, Lewiston, Cache County; Robert Johnson, Ogden; Clark Roberts, Myton, Duchesne County; Richard Woolums, Pleasant Grove; Robert Wilcox, LaSal, San Juan County; Pat Gonder, Garrison, Millard County; and Marlene Haws, Escalante, Garfield County.

Utah postmasters, in the association's 49th annual convention, voted to oppose any change in the federal law that gives the Postal Service exclusive right to handle first-class mail, all proposed changes in the civil service retirement system and proposals to close 12,500 small post offices in the country as an economy measure. They passed a resolution asking postmaster vacancies in Utah be filled within 120 days.

Rural postmasters protesting proposal to close small offices

Tues 16 July 1985

BOISE (AP) — A Grace Commission recommendation to save \$272 million over a three-year period by closing small post offices has prompted concern among some rural postmasters in Idaho.

Postmasters in rural towns such as Culdesac, Ahsahka, and Elk City say the closing of the local post office could mean the end of a community.

Postmaster Betty J. Nitzi says there's no way Elk City could survive without a post office. "We're 60 miles away from another town."

The effect of post office closures would be "devastating," said Elizabeth Heimgartner, postmaster at Juliaetta. "There just wouldn't be a town anymore."

The Grace Commission is a group of business leaders and professionals asked by President Reagan to eliminate waste and inefficiency in the federal government. The commission was chaired by J. Peter Grace, chairman and chief executive officer of W.R. Grace & Co., a business management consulting firm.

More than 12,000 small post offices across the United States could be closed if the commission's suggestion to replace "limited mail service offices with alternative ser-

vices" is adopted.

"They're always trying to do this," said Violet D. Harrell, who, as postmaster at Ahsahka for 11 years and postal employee for 22, has faced closure many times.

But Kendrick Postmaster Don Chrystal said he thinks rumors spreading among officials of rural post offices are being "blown out of proportion."

"It's not that alarming," Chrystal said. "Post offices close all the time, for many reasons. It isn't going to happen on a wholesale basis."

Worries were strong enough, however, to prompt the state association of postmasters to call on its members to write Rep. Larry Craig and Sen. Steve Symms about possible closures.

Craig said he has been assured by the Congressional liaison for the United States Postal Service that there are no plans to close any Idaho post offices.

Federal law requires the Postal Service to give written notice of a proposed postal closing to all patrons who would be affected and gives those individuals a right to a hearing and right to appeal the decision.

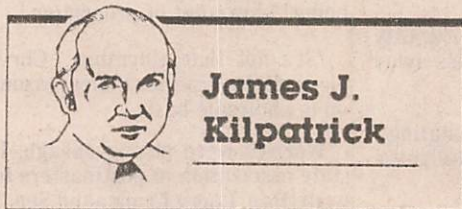


ould the secretary of the world's most powerful cartel, the terror of the West, the scourge of
prise system, and the revenge of the third world, care to read the minutes of our last
meeting?"

murder — mesmerizing

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with Lady Macbeth, but also with Medea. As
Euripides told the tale, Medea began her ca-
reer by killing her brother. She fell in with
Jason. To hold his love, she tricked the
daughters of King Pelias into murdering
their father. Sent into exile in Corinth, she
winds up by hating Jason. In revenge for his
deserting her, she poisons Jason's daughter
by his new wife and completes the horror by

wealthy Mrs. Schreuder, benefactor of the
New York City Ballet, at the time of her
arrest and trial. I suppose the Schreuder
case was big news in New York, and certain-
ly big news in Utah, but the story never
reached the boondocks in Virginia. I will not
spoil the suspense for equally uninformed
readers by revealing how the trial of
Frances turned out.

I have said it a good many times publicly,
and remark it again here, that my beloved
adversary of "60 Minutes" was out of her
element in TV. Shana is a writer. She is the
best court reporter in the country, the best
anywhere since Rebecca West covered the
Nuremberg trials. Her previous books on the
Patty Hearst case and the trial of Jean Har-
ris are classics in their field.